BUILDING A WOOD FIRED OVEN IN A DAY

The Artisan Bakery School

Build a Wood Fired Oven in a Day

Make a Mini Wood Fired Oven for under £100
Ideal for baking breads, pizzas and other dishes
By The Artisan Bakery School
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Why a little wood fired oven is a big idea!

The wood fired oven at The Artisan Bakery School is massive (see picture below). It has a door opening into the bakery and another one into the garden, with a 1.5 square meter baking area. It's big because we use it for baking bread and pizzas to sell to our village in Devon. But, because it's so big, it takes up to 6 hours of burning wood to reach the right temperature for baking bread, and about 3 hours for baking pizzas.

As we like to bake bread and eat pizza even when we're not feeding the village, we quickly realised we needed something smaller and simpler too. We wanted something that would bake breads **and** pizzas like a real wood fired oven, but would take much less time and effort and consume much less wood to get going. It has to be useable for teaching baking, and it also had to be cheap and easy to build.

The solution wasn't obvious at first. We tossed around dozens of ideas, and nothing seemed to fit. We didn't want another permanent structure in the garden, and we didn't want to buy something we'd have to store indoors in the winter. So off-the-shelf options weren't right for us. And the self-build plans we could find were all expensive and complicated, or labour-intensive and expertise-demanding, rather the like the big woodfired oven we had just built!

Then one day, Dragan remembered some baking he had done in the past in a type of an oven that his ancestors used for centuries. This oven answered all of our criteria. It took Dragan just one day to put this mini wood fired oven together, and it makes pizzas and breads taste even better than the ones we bake in our professional wood fired oven.

Passionate as we are about teaching and sharing the joys of authentic bread and pizza baking, we decided to share our mini wood fired oven story with you - that's all of you who have always fancied baking ‘the old fashioned way’, but could not build or afford to buy a wood fired oven. It currently costs under £100 for materials to build it, and it requires no special skills. You can make your own in just one day.

Happy building and happy baking!

Dragan and Penny

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the lovers of old ways of baking great bread and pizzas.

Advantages of a Mini Wood Fired Oven

You can build one in even a small garden
It takes very little space
It takes only one hour to get hot enough for baking
It does not require much fuel
It is highly versatile. You can bake:
Pizzas
Breads
Potatoes
Casseroles
and you can use it as a barbecue base.

The Plan

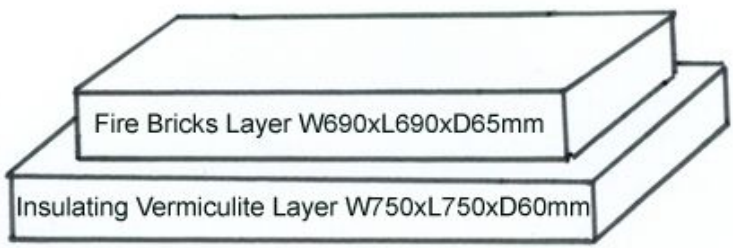
The mini wood fired oven consists of two simple parts: the Hearth and the Peka (half-bell). That's all!

Hearth

The hearth is made of two layers:

1. Insulating Vermiculite Foundation

2. Fire Bricks Layer



USA Measurements

Fire Bricks Layer W27" x L27" x D2½"

Insulating Vermiculite Layer W29½" x L29½" x D2¼"

The two layers sit in a dug out hole 800x800mm (31½"x31½"). The fire brick layer is positioned centrally on the top of the insulating vermiculite concrete foundation. Additional vermiculite concrete insulation is poured around the sides of the fire bricks, thus insulating the hearth from underneath and on all four sides. The only surface of the hearth that is not insulated is the top baking surface. Insulation is essential to prevent heat leaking out of the fire bricks and back into the ground. A properly insulated hearth allows the heat to accumulate and reach ideal baking temperatures of up to 270°C/518°F.

Peka

The peka performs the function of the dome on brick or clay wood fired ovens. It should be made of steel (1-3mm thick - 1/16" to 1/8") and it can vary in size. A medium-sized one would be 300mm/12" in diameter and 250mm/10" high. Ordinary stainless steel bowls can be

turned upside down and used providing they have flat bottoms for the hot ashes to sit on and create the necessary heat on top (winter 360°C/680°F - summer 300°C/572°F). Baking temperatures in wood fired ovens are always lower on the oven sole (floor) than above the loaf/pizza, as heat rises. You will need good fireproof gloves to handle the bowl or the bell.

Our peka, below, is made of 3mm/1/8" thick cast iron and has a handle and a removable cast iron ring that serves to keep the hot ashes on top so that they don't slide down.

Materials, Tools and Costs

Essentials for Building

Vermiculite (100 litre/26 gallon bag) £19
Bag of Cement (25kg/55lb) £15
Fire Bricks* x 18 £36
Peka (Steel Bell) from around £10
2 lengths sawn timber (L2500mm/98" W60mm/2¼" D25mm/1") £8
Total £88

*Fire Brick size (230mm/9"x110mm/4¼"x65mm/2½")

Alumina content 35% to 40%. You can use other sizes, but may need more or fewer bricks.

Tools for the Job

Shovel
Trowel
Spirit-level
Piece of straight wood 900mm/35½" long

Useful Items for Baking

Infra red thermometer
Pizza Peel
Fire Gloves
Fire Handling Set*

*Fire Handling Set (Fire Tongs; Mini Fire Shovel; Wire Brush)

7 Steps to Building Your Own Mini Wood Fired Oven

Step 1

Find peka (stainless bowl or steel fire bowl)

Step 2

Choose the site and prepare the ground

Step 3

Dig a hole for the hearth

Step 4

Make a simple insulated foundation

Step 5

Lay the fire bricks

Step 6

Insulate the sides

Step 7

Fire up your mini wood fired oven!

Step 1: Find Peka

For the top of the oven you'll need a peka. When choosing your peka, keep in mind the ideal size of your pizzas and breads.

If you want to bake several pizzas at once, you will need to have two smaller bowls that will fit on your hearth at the same time.

Alternatively, steel fire bowls can be purchased online for around £30 and inverted on your hearth; these will bake several loaves or pizzas all at once. You can use the legs as handles if they're welded on.

Otherwise, large stainless steel kitchen bowls will do.

Make sure that the bowl has a flat base so that you can pile some hot embers on the top of it when baking. Ideally, you would want to weld a handle on yours so that it is easy to use. However, a knife and a pair of fire gloves will help you move it off or onto the hearth easily.

Sizes:

Diameter: 200mm/8" to 350mm/14"

Height: 150mm/6" to 200mm/8"

Step 2: Choose and Prepare the Ground

Find a good spot in the garden.

The size of the ground area should be 900mm/35½"x900mm/35½".If you have room, make it larger as the space will come in useful, especially if at a later date you plan to have more kids or choose to build a wind shield around the hearth.

Consider: the prevailing wind, the trees, the neighbors and your house. Make sure your site is at least several meters away from any boundary walls.

Make sure that the area surrounding the hearth is clear of shrubs and plants as the naked fire will scorch anything within a few meters of it.

We chose the site of a raised flower bed because this position suited our garden the best, but making the mini wood fire oven on ground level is completely fine too. In the background you'll see our big wood fired oven. In the foreground is the wheelbarrow with loose vermiculite.

Step 3: Dig a Hole for the Hearth

Digging a hole is actually optional. It is done to keep the baking surface flush with the ground, which suited the design of our garden. If you prefer your hearth to be raised, you will need to consider some kind of finish for the outside of the box frame, to make it more attractive. Tiles or slates or anything else that doesn't burn would do the job.

The oven hearth will consist of two layers:

1. The Insulated Foundation (W750mm x L750mm x D60mm - W27" x L27" x D2½")

2. The Brick Layer (W690 x L690 x D65 - W29½" x L29½" x D2¼"

The hole dimensions are (W800mm x L800mm x D125mm - W31½" x L31½" x D5")

This will leave enough space around the sides for the insulation around the fire bricks.

To make the box frame cut two 800mm/31½" lengths of wood and two 750mm/29½" lengths. You should have a square 800mmx800mm or 31½" x 31½" when you screw the pieces together. Place the frame into the hole. It should fit perfectly around the edges.

To make sure that your wood frame is level place a piece of wood and a spirit-level on top of it. Adjust as necessary. We made a deeper hole than the one recommended here because we had some left-over foam glass (an insulating material made of re-constituted windscreen glass) which we put at the bottom of the hole and then poured the vermiculite concrete on top of it. The wood on top was also used for spreading and leveling the vermiculite concrete once the hole was filled.

If you are not digging a hole, set the frame in your desired hearth position and level it.

Note: due to the size of the hole in our raised bed, we didn't need to cut four pieces of wood, but only two as you can see from the picture.

Step 4: Make a Simple Insulated Foundation

Before you start, find a straight piece of wood that is about 900mm long. You will need this to level the concrete once you fill in the hole, or fill in your box frame.

Using a small plastic bucket or a large plastic jug (1 leter/2 pints) as a measure, mix one part of cement to 6 parts of vermiculite. Gradually add water until you achieve a sludge with a consistency like thick porridge. You will not need the whole bag of cement, and certainly not the whole bag of vermiculite. In any case, keep about 10 litres/18 pints of vermiculite for later. Just mix enough to fill the hole to the top.

Tip the vermiculite cement mix into the wood frame. Once you have enough of the mix inside the area start levelling it with the piece of wood by leaning the wood on the sides and moving it across the square area.

Once you are happy that your vermiculite concrete square is level, leave it to set for 3 to 4 hours.

Step 5: Lay the Fire Bricks

When the vermiculite concrete is hardened but not totally dry, you can lay the fire bricks. Start the first row with the bricks meeting on the shorter edge, then the second or third row with the bricks meeting on the longer side and then on the shorter again, until you have placed all 18 bricks. I only had to cut the last brick in the top left corner to finish the square. The bricks do not need mortar between them as they will sit nicely on the vermiculite concrete, but you must ensure they are set with no gaps between them.

As you lay the bricks, make sure that they are level with each other by adding or removing material (use sand) under the bricks.

When you are done you should have a level square hearth approximately 690mmx690mm - 27" x 27".

Step 6: Insulate the Sides

Mix the remaining 10 litres/18 pints of vermiculite with the cement (6:1 ratio as before).

If you have dug a hole, remove the wood frame.

Fill in the gap between the bricks and the earth with the mix. Using the trowel make sure it is smooth. You can taper it slightly downwards away from the bricks to help rain to run off.

If you have built a raised hearth, fill the angle between the bricks and the concrete base with the vermiculite cement. Taper it downwards as in the picture.

Cover with plastic and leave to dry for several days.

Step 7: Fire Your Mini Wood Fired Oven

Baking Bread

Get the fire going - you'll need about 10 medium logs, seen here. In cold weather, you can add charcoal or even coal to boost the temperature.

Once the fire has died down, spread out the embers and check the

temperature. 310°C/590°F is good as the temperature will drop to the ideal baking temperature of 260°C/500°F soon after you set the bread on the hearth. If you haven't got an infra-red thermometer, you can throw some semolina onto the bricks. If it burns, the temperature is good. It takes about one hour of good burning to get the surface really hot.

Once you're happy with the temperature, quickly sprinkle your peel with semolina, place your dough on it, make the slashes in the dough and place it in the middle of hot hearth. Alternatively, to stop the base from cooling too much, you may want to have your dough ready before you spread the embers.

Cover the dough with the peka.

Cover the peka with hot embers - this is where the timing is essential. Depending on time of the year, the embers will have to be hotter or cooler. Using the infra red thermometer, check the temperature on the surface of the peka. It should be around 360°C/680°F in the winter and 300°C/572°F in the summer.

After 30 to 45 minutes of baking, your bread should be ready to serve!

Bonus: If the embers are still very hot you can bake some potatoes as explained in the Baking Potatoes chapter.

Congratulations, you have made your very own Mini Wood Fired Oven!

Please note, for details on how to make bread please check our other books at the back. Thank you.

Baking Pizzas

Now, this is even more exciting than bread!

Start a fire of the same size as in baking bread chapter. Add two handfuls of charcoal to raise the heat as pizza baking needs 310°C/590°F for the base and up to 400°C/752°F from above.

Check the base temperature with an infra-red thermometer (320°C/610°F) and place the pizza in the middle. Cover with the peka

immediately. It is important to remember to leave a few smoking embers under peka. They will give your pizza a wonderful smoky taste!

Scoop hot embers on top of the peka and sweep them up its sides. Check the temperature by pointing the red dot from the infra-red thermometer directly on the surface of the peka (400°C/752°F or more). Remember that the infra-red thermometer works better on dull surfaces than on shiny ones.

Time the pizza for two minutes. Check it by lifting the peka off. If pizza is not browned around the edges and the cheese has not gone

golden, give it another minute. You can also check the bottom of the pizza and see if it is browned. If not, the heat from the base was insufficient. If any part of the pizza is black, get it out of the fire fast!

When you're happy with the finish, slice, serve and most importantly, enjoy the pizza!

We have made thousands of pizzas, in an electric oven (great taste) and in our woodfired oven (wonderful taste). We have never tasted better pizza than the one that is baked in our Mini Wood Fired Oven. It's the real thing.

Now, if your pizza doesn't come out perfect first time, enjoy it anyway. Make another one soon. And another and another… You will notice they get better and better.

Happy Pizzas!

Please note, for details on how to make great pizzas, please check our other books at the back. Thank you.

Baking Potatoes

If you have enough hot embers left you can bake some potatoes. The method is simple and these two pictures say it all.

Cooking Stews and Casseroles

This is the simplest way of baking with a mini wood fired oven.

The key is to find a flame-proof container that will fit under your peka without touching the sides or the top or a peka that fits your favourite dish! Fire-proof clay pots with lids are great, but you can improvise.

You can adapt all kinds of casserole / stew recipes. Our favourite is Fazol (fa-jol) a typical Croatian bean stew, usually flavoured with pancetta or other smoked sausage. Since we don't eat meat, we use smoked salmon to add that extra savoury flavour.

Dragan's Fazol

Ingredients:

One large onion (chopped)
5 cloves of garlic (peeled and chopped)
2 cans of borlotti beans or similar (rinsed in water)
2 medium courgettes, diced
150g/5.3oz smoked salmon, chopped
2 bay leaves
A pinch of mixed dried herbs
2 vegetable stock cubes
Water
Sesame oil
Olive oil
Cayenne pepper
Chopped fresh parsley to garnish.

Method:

Start a fire as when baking bread and pizzas.

While the fire is heating the base of your hearth, fry the onion and garlic in olive oil with a dash of sesame oil. You can do this directly over the flames, if you have a small saucepan and fire gloves. Put the onion and garlic in your casserole dish and add the beans, bay leaves, mixed herbs, cayenne, stock cubes and enough water to just cover the beans.

When the fire has been going for about 30 minutes, make a clearing on the hearth and put the casserole in the middle, covering it with the peka.

If you leave some burning embers inside the peka, and don't put a lid on your casserole, this will add wonderful intensity to the smokey

flavour, but you need to add a little bit more water to allow for evaporation.

Using fire gloves and a trowel, cover the top of the peka with glowing embers.

Leave the Fazol to cook for about 45 minutes and then add the courgettes. Cook for another 10 minutes. Add the salmon pieces at the end of cooking, just allowing them to heat through.

Serve and enjoy outside in the open.

There you have it; a traditional Croatian Fazol, in your own back garden!

Thank you for purchasing this book!

If you enjoyed this book and would like to share your experience of reading it, please leave your feedback.

Your comments are greatly appreciated.

If you have questions and recommendation please email us first rather than placing a negative comment.

Thank you!

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A Million and One Original Bread Recipes

There are more potential recipes for brilliant breads than there are games of chess or atoms in the known universe!

This breakthrough book from The Artisan Bakery School not only shows you how to make great breads, but how to successfully develop original recipes of your own.

* Make authentic artisan breads following our simple Seven Steps, fully illustrated with tips and techniques for improving the taste and looks of your loaves.

* Learn proportions for incorporating 100 different nuts, seeds, fruits, veg, cheeses, meats, herbs and spices etc.

* Successfully combine ingredients to balance flavours and textures

* Choose the right flours for different loaves

* Create stunning original recipes of your own

* Including over 50 recipe suggestions developed by The Artisan Bakery School plus details of our seven star performers.

An inspiration for adventurous bakers of any level!

Baking Real Sourdough Bread

Wild sourdough magic at your fingertips!

Written by two passionate artisan bakers and teachers, this book dispels the myth that sourdough is difficult and time-consuming to make. It shows how to fit regular baking into even the craziest lifestyle by using an ordinary fridge and the principle of retardation – or 'slo-mo' dough.

Packed with clear explanations and helpful photographs the book shows:

* The Seven Steps to creating truly exceptional artisan loaves
* How to create, manage and maintain a wild yeast leaven
* How to choose and use the best flours
* The secrets of long fermentation
* Tips on improving the look, taste and texture of your loaves.
* Insights on managing the three T's: Timing, Temperature and Technique
* How to bake sourdough that tastes the way you want it to – from milky to truly tart
* Includes original recipes from The Artisan Bakery School.

A handbook for anyone reaching for a real life-skill.

Artisan Bread for Beginners

Artisan bread is often sourdough, but beginners can achieve equally impressive results without using a sourdough culture. The secret is in a process called retardation – or 'slo-mo'dough. This book shows you how to use your fridge so you can fit baking authentic artisan bread into even the most hectic lifestyle.

It includes:

* Our proven Seven Steps method for reliable results every time
* Illustrations of all the steps, backed up with clear explanations
* Insights into the three Ts: timing, temperature and technique
* Tips on improving the look, taste and texture of your loaves.
* Ideas for using fruits, nuts and seeds to create an impressive selection of wonderful, original breads
* Original recipes developed by The Artisan Bakery School

A handbook for anyone reaching for a real life-skill.

Perfect Pizza

Friday nights are pizza nights at The Artisan Bakery School, where we sell wood fired pizzas for locals to take away. Our experience of making, shaping and baking great pizza, and teaching these skills to our students, is now available in this short, fully illustrated handbook for budding pizzaristas.

Discover:

* The Seven Steps to making the perfect pizza dough

* How to manage refrigeration so your dough will wait for you, not the other way around

* Techniques for shaping your dough into perfect circles without a rolling pin

* Tips for creating your own signature sauce

* Hints on how best to dress your pizza

* The secrets of the tarte flambée

* How to get the very best out of your home gas or electric oven, for crispy crust and delectably tender dough

A handbook for anyone reaching for a real life-skill.

Baking Low Gluten & Heritage Breads

As the tide of people suffering with sensitivities to modern wheat and gluten continues to rise, the need for a fresh approach to baking bread is obvious.

Through clear text and pictures, this book shows you how to bake beautiful, nutritious artisan loaves using low gluten and heritage flours and a natural, wild yeast leaven. The Artisan Bakery School's Seven Steps method makes the baking ultra simple, while the gourmet recipes will inspire you to show off to your friends.

Learn:

* Why heritage flours are better for your body
* How to make a range of rich and characterful breads in seven easy steps
* How to make and manage consistently healthy wild yeast starters
* Tips for improving the looks, taste and texture of every bread you bake
* How to choose, source and combine various heritage flours
* To control the three Ts: timing, temperature, technique
* The best ways to use seeds

If you care about what you eat, this book is for you!

The Microbakery Blueprint

This book is a practical guide to turning your bread-making into a successful microbakery business. Focusing on Dragan and Penny's start-up bakery in the tiniest house in Oxford, UK, and going on to the success of The Artisan Bakery School in Devon, The Microbakery Business Blueprint gives all the nitty-gritty details of running a baking business from home.

* The local legal requirements: Environmental Health, licences etc.

* How to start trading with minimum initial investment – just one oven!

* Getting a handle on finances, branding and marketing

* How to cost and price your breads

* Business development and the importance of growing organically

* Setting a baking schedule to match your stamina

If you like the idea of being able to manage your own time, earning a living ethically and contributing to your local community, this book is for you.

For details on how to make good bread, see the Artisan Bakery School companion volumes: Artisan Bread for Beginners or Baking Real Sourdough Bread, A Million and One Original Bread Recipes and Baking Low Gluten Sourdough Bread.

The Micropizzeria Blueprint

The Micropizzeria Blueprint, and its companion volume Perfect Pizza, are the most recent books from The Artisan Bakery School. Together, they show how almost “anyone with a kitchen and a phone” can learn to be a pizzarista, and run a takeaway pizza business from home, or from a mobile pizza van. Practical advice includes:

* Compliance with local legal requirements
* The basics of finances, branding and marketing
*Choosing and using your oven: wood fired or professional stone-baker
* Costing initial outlay on equipment
* Planning your work area
* Costing and pricing your pizzas
* Lists of equipment and suppliers

Having built a wood fired oven, Dragan and Penny now sell takeaway pizza from The Artisan Bakery School every week and it’s becoming increasingly popular. Properly made pizza is certainly ‘fast’ food, but it can also be healthy, exciting, ethically produced and a runaway success for you too. This book shows you how!

About The Artisan Bakery School

The Artisan Bakery School is devoted to outstanding real breads and pizzas.

Run by Penny and Dragan at their 200-year old cottage in rural Devon, England, the School also serves the village of Sparkwell as a bakery / pizzeria. We have baked bread for our local gastronomic restaurant, ran by the winner of the UK Masterchef 2012, Anton Piotrowsky.

We are passionate about passing on the basic life-skill of baking real bread to as many people as possible; for their health, for their happiness, and because it's great fun! We have taught students of every age from 3 to 83, from all over the world and every walk of life. We were also one of the first schools in the country to offer a Microbakery / Micropizzeria Business courses.

Our special interests are in heritage flours and heirloom techniques, including baking in a real wood fired oven, or using the ancient Croatian method of baking 'under the bell'.

Dragan and Penny also run Pendragan Publishing and are authors of a number of fictional books.

We'd love to hear from you!

Our Baking Books on Amazon

Contact Us

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bakers@theartisanbakeryschool.com

To find out more about our one-day and residential courses, our woodfired pizza parties or our workshops-on-wheels, please visit:

www.theartisanbakeryschool.com

About Dragan

Dragan's story

"My fascination with breadmaking was born of necessity in the mid seventies, when I first arrived in this country. The bread in England then was, and still largely is, fast to produce and chemically induced. No wonder that today we have such a huge number of people suffering from bread allergies.

Coming from a macho culture, barely able to fry an egg, I was forced to learn how to bake a decent loaf, just to survive.

But my really passionate quest for the perfect loaf began later on in my life. Wanting to learn absolutely everything about what makes dough work, I picked up tips from master bakers everywhere, as well as trying one thousand and one ways of making bread.

The answer was to ditch everything but the essentials (good flour, clean water, salt and yeast) and give it all plenty of time.

Today, to make my perfect loaf, I prefer to use heritage flours (or gluten free flour), coupled with the time-honoured method of long fermentation, which makes delicious and beautiful breads that are also good for health.

I use mainly sourdough retardation method because it is dead easy (15 minutes hands on) and produces the best tasting loaves. My dough takes between 12 and 144 hours to develop and each loaf is carefully hand-crafted. That's why I call my loaves 'artisan'.

My greatest pleasure is when people come to us saying that they can eat bread again, because properly fermented dough is easy to digest. Or our students telling us that after the course with us they have never bought another loaf of bread again!"

Apart from baking Dragan does magic shows for all ages and writes books for children.

About Penny

Penny was fortunate enough to have a mother and two grandmothers who were all great cooks, and happy to have their kids in the kitchen. The teaching came almost by osmosis.

As a three-year old Penny remembers coming in from the garden to poke a curious, muddy finger into a mesmerising pillow of white dough rising in a bowl and squeaking with guilty alarm at the grubby dent she had made. To her astonishment, the dent disappeared, just as her laughing mother said it would. Penny's lifelong passion for creating good food made it natural for her to bake bread, but it wasn't until she met Dragan that she really developed those skills.

The Rise of Real Bread Conference in 2009 was her first encounter with the artisan bakers, millers, farmers, scientists, ecologists, writers and activists that are fighting for a better loaf on Britain's tables. It was a watershed moment.

Penny says "We can only change the way people bake and think about bread one person at a time. But if we do it often enough, for long enough, we will contribute to positive change. That's our reason for being.

But the most fun part of The Artisan Bakery School is running the weekend courses. It's all about making people feel at home, preparing something special for them at every meal, gathering round the table, or round the fire, enjoying a glass of wine and telling stories after dinner. You wouldn't believe how many amazing tales our bakers have to tell!"

Apart from being a baker Penny is a professional copywriter and an author of a number of fictional books, both for children and adults.

Services

Dragan and Penny offer Skype consultations, at a fee, on any aspect of the book.

We also do book editing, translation and copywriting services.

Contact Us

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